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ABSTRACT

John Milton employs classical rhetorical techniques in "Paradise Lost" to accomplish Satan's temptation of Eve which begins on line 524 and ends with line 732 of Book 9; however, Satan's oration resembles pejorative sophistry and Milton uses Ciceronian arrangement for Satan's argument. Milton envisions Satan as a clever, cunning creature who purposely misleads Eve--an innocent. In the exordium Satan uses flattery to attract Eve's attention. In the narrative section Satan lies to Eve about how he gained the power of speech. In the partition Satan forces Eve to acknowledge the existence of the Tree of Knowledge from which he obtained the fruit, and he addresses her reservations about partaking of the fruit. The confirmation section employs an Aristotelian enthymeme in which Satan ostensibly delineates an inconsistency in God's commandment. In the refutation Satan uses ambiguity, deceit, and a spurious enthymeme to seduce Eve. Finally, in the peroration, Satan recalls his arguments, ignites ill will against God, and arouses sympathy in Eve. Milton also sympathizes with Eve because he sees her as unequfpped to argue with Satan on the same intellectual level. Throughout this oration Milton continues to remind the reader/student than these dishonorable and illogical means of persuasion are antithetical to the Classicists' intentions and consummate for illustrating Satan's character. (Author/PRA)

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SATAN'S TEMPTATION OF EVE IN PARADISE LOST: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

In the ninth book of Paradise Lost, John Milton offers his representation of the turning point in man's relationship with God--the temptation of Eve by Satan and the subsequent fall from grace. An examination of the mere 207 lines which comprise this discourse between Satan and Eve reveals the overwhelming influence of Classical rhetoric on which Milton draws to show Satan as man's enemy in his Christian epic. Milton employs the same rhetorical techniques used by orators in ancient Greece and Rome throughout Satan's speech thus allowing Satan to persuade Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. However, Satan is not an admirable orator like those influenced by Aristotelian logic and Ciceronian arrangement who used the simple, truthful, logical persuasion, and whom Milton seems to emulate. In fact, Satan's rhetoric contains more characteristics of the pejorative sophists noted for their lack of moral ethics. Therefore, Milton intends for the reader to recognize Satan's attempts at flattery, hypocrisy, and confusing arguments, while at the same time, allowing Satan to succeed in seducing the innocent Eve who cannot distinguish between his fallacies and the truth. Satan's

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rhetoric most nearly follows Ciceronian arrangement of oration and is of the deliberative category seeking to exhort action. Cicero's six divisions of oration include exordium, narrative, partition, confirmation, refutation, and peroration (Benson and Prosser 196-205). Additionally, within each of these divisions, Milton alters Satan's logos in conjunction with his assumed ethos to allow successful persuasion to take place. Thus, through Classical techniques of arrangement and proofs, Milton says much to further his purpose to "justify the ways of God to men" (line 26), and to demonstrate Satan's fundamental dishonesty. Satan's ostensible argument is the injustice committed by God in His prohibition against eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, but as Milton the narrator indicates to the reader, the question is not injustice to man but obedience to God.

Satan's exordium, characterized by flattery, begins with line 524 as Satan possesses the body of a snake in the garden and comes to Eve in an unthreatening form. Eve is not afraid but does exhibit surprise to hear an animal speak. By offering himself to Eve as a lowly creature who wants to worship her, Satan flatters Eve; in other words, the orator adjusts his rhetoric to suit his needs and the pathos of his audience. Through actions and words, Satan gains Eve's attention and flatters her by licking the ground where she has walked and by verbally appealing to her vanity. Satan as the serpent speaks to

Eve in these lofty words:

> Fairest resemblance of thy Maker fair,
> Thee all things living gaze on, all things thine
> By gift, and thy celestial beauty adore
> With ravishment beheld, there best beheld
> Where universally admired;... (lines 538-542).

Next, he calls her a "goddess" and says what a pity it is that only one man sees her when she should be "adored and served / by angels." Eve, unaccustomed to such praise, accepts the serpent's words, and unreservedly believes whatever interpretation he offers. Even line 549 (which is only 25 lines into the first discourse with Eve) is a clue to the reader that Satan's intentions are suspect because Milton as narrator of the poem editorializes that the Tempter "glozed" which has an archaic definition meaning "to use flattery or deceit" (OED 236). With this continuous insincere praise from Satan, the pathos becomes receptive and ultimately leads to Eve's transgression.

Eve's first question to the serpent is how he above other animals ("brutes") in the garden has the capacity for speech. Thus begins the narrative section of Satan's oration, and with this new section, Satan employs deceit. In this particular case, Satan relates a false story to Eve of how he was just as other animals until he came upon a plentiful fruit tree that was so inviting to his senses he was compelled to slither up into its

branches and eat the fruit until satiated. At this time he became a creature cognizant of higher reasoning powers; therefore, he becomes like man--the power of the fruit has raised his status in God's hierarchy of creatures (Steadman 170-171). Of course, in the contextual reality of the poem, the reader knows that Satan entered the snake's body through its mouth and is only using the snake's body as a disguise--an allegorical gesture to hide his true mission which is the corruption of the new creature that God calls "man." Satan lies to Eve, but because Eve is the unsuspecting victim, Satan's explanation achieves verisimilitude and Eve thinks his story plausible. She reasons that Adam and she have not canvassed the entire garden, so as yet some plants are not familiar to them. However, she also responds with doubt as to the "virtue of that fruit" (line 616).

Now as Satan's initial contact with Eve proves successful and Eve has voiced a further concern having dismissed the original one, the partition section begins. The snake leads Eve to the Tree of Knowledge where Eve acknowledges the existence of the fruit (the agreement within the argument), but she says that God has commanded that they should not touch or eat of this tree (the disagreement within the argument). Satan's next step is to convince Eve that she will not be hurt if she disobeys God's commandment. The logos of Satan's rhetoric now becomes an

Aristotelian enthymeme, and the confirmation part of his oration starts at this point. In Lines 656-658 Satan questions: "Indeed? hath God then said that of the fruit / Of all these garden trees ye shall not eat, / Yet lords declared of all in earth or air?" The logical problem involved in these lines is Satan's denial of God's omnipotence. Satan appears to have pointed out an inconsistency in logic in these three lines, but the question that Milton wants the reader to ask is: Have Adam and Eve, in fact, been declared lords of all in earth or air? And, the answer is: no; they have been given dominion over the animals and the garden but are still subordinate to God. So Satan has assigned an authority to Adam and Eve that they do not have, and thereafter he manipulates Eve's reasoning from that false authority. According to hypothetical syllogistic rules, in this particular instance, the rhetorical syllogism is thus: if Adam and Eve are declared lords of all in earth or air (A), then they are able to eat from all the trees in the garden (B); and it follows that if Adam and Eve are not declared lords of all in earth or air (A), then there is no conclusion to be drawn from that premise. God and Satan have quite different definitions of authority.

One of Satan's most blatant displays of hypocrisy and false testimony occurs in lines 679-683 in which he passionately elucidates:

O sacred, wise, and wisdom-giving plant,
Mother of science, now I feel thy power
Within me clear, not only to discern
Things in their causes, but to trace the ways
Of highest agents, deemed however wise.

By this point in the oration, Eve is completely duped by Satan's story, and her only other objection is the threat of death promised by God if she eats the fruit. Her honest concern is her disobedience to God. Nevertheless, Satan's response to her concern for death when expressed in line 663 is another attempt to strengthen the pathos of the situation as the narrator relates in lines 665-669:

The Tempter, but with show of zeal and love
To man, and indignation at his wrong,
New part puts on, and as to passion mov'd,
Fluctuates disturb'd, yet comely, and in act
Raised, as of some great matter to begin.

Clearly, Satan feigns this compassion toward man; however, Eve is easily cozened.

In order to refute Eve's objection (the opposing argument of God in this oration), Satan must now resort to truly despicable means--the use of ambiguity to mislead. Milton allows Satan to take advantage of Eve's ignorance of the meanings of the words "die" and "death." The reader knows that Satan is

already dead spiritually, so his argument that he has eaten the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and still lives is ironic as well as untrue. The refutation section begins with line 684 as Satan once more initiates his discourse with flattery:

> Queen of this universe, do not believe
> Those rigid threats of death; ye shall not die:
> How should ye? By the fruit? It gives you life
> To knowledge. By the Threat'ner? Look on me,
> Me who have touched and tasted, yet both live,
> And life more perfet have attained than fate
> Meant me, by vent'ring higher than my lot.

One purpose of these seven lines is the Classical attack on the opposition. Satan offers himself as logical proof that death will not occur if one eats the forbidden fruit. Satan even pretends not to know what "death" is in line 695. Satan's "proof" is his lie that he ate the fruit and gained human-like knowledge. He says he is the "evidence." Eve has only his word that these events did indeed take place, but Eve is not a worthy adversary for Satan's rhetoric and once again she is fooled by his deceit. Eve becomes more confused as Satan continually seems to reveal the "logical weaknesses of God's prohibition" (Nicolson 285). Another purpose of these lines is to appeal to Eve's sense of ambition. Satan argues that if an animal can be elevated to human status, then surely Eve will be elevated to god-like status

with wisdom of God and the angels. In his chapter "Character and Rhetoric in Paradise Lost," John M. Steadman refers to this change in status as Satan's "'consentany argument' from the lesser to the greater" (Emma and Shawcross 205). Obviously, the argument relies on false testimony which Eve has already accepted as true.

The second part of the refutation involves understanding the concepts of good and evil and the introduction of the fear of death. Satan refers to the act as a "petty trespass" and tries to persuade Eve that in order to avoid evil she needs to know the difference between good and evil. Satan wants to undermine God's authority by employing deductive reasoning. The last three lines of the refutation, lines 700-702, are as follows: 'God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just; / Not just, not God; not feared then, nor obeyed: / Your fear itself of death removes the fear.' Satan's argument hinges on the idea of fear, and he has added this idea to a categorical syllogism that actually proves logical in accordance with sufficient causalities, but the addition is not a logical consequence. The enthymeme is this: if God is just (A), then God cannot hurt you (B), but there is sufficient reason to believe that if God is not just (A), then God can hurt you (B). In Adam and Eve's prelapsarian condition, they do not obey God because they fear Him; on the contrary, they obey Him because they love and respect Him. In this passage Eve

has never mentioned fearing God the way that Satan fears God or the way that Satan wants her to fear God. Eve only explains to the serpent that if they breach God's law, death will occur and she knows that they do not want death. Under Aristotle's list of spurious enthymemes, he discusses those arguments which add a final statement "to pass for the conclusion of a logical process, when no such process has been performed" (Aristotle 76). Satan has done exactly that. He adds the seemingly logical conclusion that if God is not just and therefore not God, then Eve is under no obligation to fear Him or to obey Him. What is made plain in these lines is Satan's intention to make Eve question God's commandment as right or wrong and to overlook Eve's honest intention to obey whatever God says.

The peroration begins on line 703, and in accordance with Cicero's explication, Satan sums-up his arguments, he ignites indignation or ill-will against the opponent (God), and he arouses pity and sympathy in his audience. He begins by repeating the question: why is it forbidden to eat this fruit? Satan recalls how the act has given him power beyond his previous abilities and death did not come to him. Also, he recalls his statement that if man is to be master over the animals, man should not be barred from elements of which animals freely partake. Next, Satan's strategy is to call into question the rationale that all necessities proceed from God and His angels.

Satan says he sees them producing nothing. He has twisted God's creation and His commandment in such a way as to seem ludicrous and insipid to Eve. It cannot be overemphasized that the issue with which Milton is dealing is the disobedience to God, not the rightfulness of God's mandate. As in lines 665-666, Satan again creates a false bond between Eve and himself as two who have been wronged by this "ridiculous" rule against eating from the Tree of Knowledge. In lines 718-722, Satan says the gods have used this threat to prevent baser creatures from becoming like gods--a direct contradiction to Milton's hierarchy of the universe as expressed throughout his De Doctrina Christiana. Milton's point is that man should not strive for equality with God, but that man should obey God's commandments, and from that obedience, God will reward humanity with eternal spiritual life. Satan even contradicts his own logic in lines 720-722 when he denies that the earth really belongs to the heavenly inhabitants because he sees them contributing no efforts to sustain the garden; yet in lines 727 and 728, Satan allows, "What can your knowledge hurt him, or this tree / Impart against his will if all be his?" This example of reverse logic serves a duel purpose: the first purpose is to show how heinous sophistic oration may be when it does not seek to persuade by honorable, logical means; the second purpose is to show how despicable Satan is.

The final part of the peroration suggests to Eve that she

should feel wrathful at this denial of knowledge, and Satan even purports that the angels could be envious of Eve. In response to Satan's question of line 729-730: "can envy dwell / in heav'nly breasts?", the answer is no, according to Milton, but Eve is unable to perceive the duplicity with which Satan has seduced and confused her. Satan's final words to her are "...These, these and many more / Causes import your need of this fair fruit. / Goddess humane, reach then, and freely taste" (lines 730-732). So in accordance with Ciceronian arrangement, this peroration ends with an arousal of emotions in Eve and an entreaty to perform the initial act of disobedience against God. Following Satan's oration, Eve considers what the serpent has said; and thinking it reasonable and truthful, she ultimately eats the fruit.

Because he was in agreement with Cicero, Milton perceived the perfect orator to be a man with great integrity of character, and that agreement is the reason for illustrating Satan's deceitfulness through his sophistic abuse of rhetoric. The Classical style and arrangement affords Milton the consummate vehicle to contrast Satan with the admirable Classical orators. Satan's deliberative oratory is filled with ethical and pathetic proofs, and each is a rhetorical device which disguises his true intent from his audience. Milton also seems to absolve Eve of the full weight of guilt that the Medieval church usually

assigned her. Milton saw Eve as an innocent creature who was intellectually unequipped to resist Satan's cunning. Nevertheless, as Aristotle pointed out, rhetoric may be used or abused to exhort to virtue or vice. So there lies Milton's justification for allowing Satan's reprehensible success with Eve through such noble means.

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ABSTRACT

Milton employs Classical rhetorical techniques in Paradise Lost to accomplish Satan's temptation of Eve which begins on line 524 and ends with line 732 of Book Nine; however, Satan's oration resembles pejorative sophistry and Milton uses Ciceronian arrangement for Satan's argument. Milton envisions Satan as a clever, cunning creature who purposely misleads Eve--an innocent. In the exordium Satan uses flattery to attract Eve's attention. In the narrative section Satan lies to Eve about how he gained the power of speech. In the partition Satan forces Eve to acknowledge the existence of the Tree of Knowledge from which he obtained the fruit, and he addresses her reservation about partaking of the fruit. The confirmation section employs an Aristotelian enthymeme in which Satan ostensibly delineates an inconsistency in God's commandment. In the refutation Satan uses ambiguity, deceit, and a spurious enthymeme to seduce Eve. Finally, in the peroration, Satan recalls his arguments, ignites ill-will against God, and arouses sympathy in Eve. Milton also sympathizes with Eve because he sees her as unequipped to argue with Satan on the same intellectual level. Throughout this oration Milton continues to remind the reader that these dishonorable and illogical means of persuasion are antithetical to the Classists' intentions and consummate for illustrating Satan's character.